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Wrongful judgment



JULIE JOSEPH/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Aneta Prantera suffers from MS and makes use of a handicap sticker for her vehicle. Recently an unnamed individual left an angry letter on her windshield for rightfully using her handicap pass at the Pen Centre. See more on page A3.



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Sexual violence protocols in review

MARYANNE FIFTH
Postmedia Network

There is no summer vacation for advocates working to improve the way sexual harassment and assault complaints are handled at Brock University.

Development of a new policy dealing with sexual violence awareness, prevention and responses will continue through summer break in preparation for September's influx of students. As will work to hire a sexual violence response and education co-ordinator, who will assist with any complaints brought forward.

Brock was thrust into the spotlight earlier this year for what many students, faculty and support staff felt was a mishandling of a sexual harassment complaint.

A former student came forward in March alleging she was told by the university to keep quiet about an internal investigation that determined a professor gave her alcohol and made sexual advances toward her late one night in his office.

Demanding change, students held a rally and faculty circulated a petition calling for improvements to Brock's protocols related to sexual harassment and assault.

In response, the university committed to developing a survivor-focused standalone sexual violence policy, hiring a response co-ordinator and creating a human rights task force to review all relevant policies and procedures.

Strides have since been made, but there is still much work to be done, said Anna Lathrop, who chairs the school's sexual violence prevention (SVP) committee.

"I think it's fair to say that we needed to respond to some concerns that were identified earlier around not enough support on campus," she said,

adding work began immediately and continued last week.

The June job posting for the response co-ordinator has closed and the process is underway to shortlist candidates and begin interviews.

When the field is narrowed and only two people remain, they will meet not only with the committee, tasked with creating the sexual violence policy, but also with various stakeholders on campus, Lathrop said.

The hope is to have someone in place by late August, or Sept. 1 at the latest, "so they can get a sense of the community, the culture here ... and be able to hit the ground running."

Students, staff and faculty all provided input to develop the job posting for the new hire to ensure an appropriate candidate was chosen. Each group has representation on the hiring committee.

In all aspects of change being proposed for the university, stakeholder input is critical, said Lathrop, who also heads the human rights task force.

There was "extensive interest" from students, as well as faculty and staff, wishing to participate in the SVP committee, she said, so much so that it grew to include 48 members and was split into four sub-committees focused on education, supports, training and policy.

Several opportunities are being offered to the school community to comment on the recently-completed draft sexual violence policy. The draft is not yet available online.

In August, the document is expected to be in the hands of Brock's various unions for review before eventually going before the board of directors for

approval in December.

"We want to do it right and that means it does take some time," Lathrop said.

Universities are complex like "mini cities," she said, and there are many diverse groups that each need to be heard.

"The more we take time to consult, the more we have buy-in from all our stakeholders and everyone feels they have ownership of the policy ... When it does go before the board we'll feel confident that everyone's had a voice."

The Brock Student Sexual Violence Support Centre has been actively involved in the policy's development.

"We are happy with the outcomes we're seeing so far," the agency's support services co-ordinator Ellie Donohue-Miller said. "We have noticed positive changes in the reporting process."

While she could not comment on specifics due to confidentiality, Donohue-Miller said clients have "found the process more accessible, transparent and safe" more recently.

However, there is still much work ahead.

"Although we have seen many promising steps in the right direction, the important piece moving forward for a safer Brock will be to ensure that policies are implemented appropriately and from a survivor-centred model," she said.

"The serious issues that came to light in March were not merely a result of poor policy, but also of inexperienced and bureaucratic first responders."

The SVP committee is also focused on education and prevention on campus, and has been working on various initiatives and training opportunities

to introduce to the coming term.

Through the support centre, members of campus police have received training centred on sexual violence prevention and reporting.

A commitment has also been made by the athletics director to see all coaches and athletes receive training, in addition to senior administration this fall, Lathrop said.

The intention is to also get Brock's unions involved, she added.

"This is an ongoing cultural commitment. This is not something that is just at the end of the summer, the beginning of fall."

Carissa Taylor, one of a handful of students who led the demonstration at the university this spring, said several initiatives are being planned for implementation in September to bring issues of sexual violence, and the process to report incidents, to the forefront.

"What we need to focus on most is what consent looks like, because often people don't understand what consent is and how to respect if people are saying no," the SVP committee member said. "A lot of sexual assault occurs during the first few weeks of school during orientation, so it's really important in the immediacy that we have those conversations and make sure we're encouraging people to be respectful and safe in what they're doing."

Education strategies are being discussed to reach out to various groups of students, including young athletes, those in residence and those who shy away from large social events and may be harder to connect with.

"The more we have these types of conversations to talk about what consent looks like, the different supports available if you have experienced sexual violence, the



JULIE JOCSA/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Brock University.

better we'll be able to respond as a community," Taylor said, adding those talks need to continue throughout the year.

"We also need to get better training for administrators. I think the way they dealt with things was really problematic and we need to make sure they understand going forward what sexual assault is, what sexual violence is, what rape culture is and why campuses are often places where this happens so much more frequently than other places."

While the culture on campus is far from perfected, Taylor said she's glad discussions have been started and that a dedicated group of advocates have come together on campus to ensure change occurs.

"I'm encouraged to see that steps are being taken, but am I satisfied? No," Taylor said. "I think there's a lot more to be done."

She's hopeful further action will be taken when incoming president Wendy Cukier takes the reins in September.

"We're hoping that she'll bring a different understanding to the issue and a differ-

ent kind of empathy for people who've experienced this."

Jack Lightstone wrapped his decade-long reign as Brock's president at the end of June. Cukier will begin her tenure Sept. 1.

Lathrop stressed the work of the SVP committee will not end with the new policy's completion.

"There will be ongoing work that will continue moving forward as we build a culture of prevention around sexual violence," she said. "That has to be an ongoing commitment and it will be."

The human rights task force, established to improve and advance human rights at Brock through changes to policies, processes, services and supports, had its first meeting July 7.

The groups will submit recommendations for change to Cukier by December.

"We have an aggressive agenda," Lathrop said. "It's an indication that we're not letting this slide over the summer months. I feel very strongly about that."

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Woman with MS gets angry letter for using handicap space

ANDREA TINNEY
Postmedia Network

Aneta Prantera has had an accessible parking permit for four years, but only uses it on "bad days."

The 29-year-old has multiple sclerosis, an autoimmune disease that destroys the coating around her nerves. The condition leads to a variety of problems, like numbness, fatigue, and trouble walking. These problems are made worse in the heat.

Aneta was shocked to find an angry note on her windshield after leaving the Pen Centre last Wednesday.

"She appears healthy, but was diagnosed with MS in 2012 after losing vision in her right eye in 2011.

"There's always a comment," said the St. Catharines native. "There's always something under someone's breath. I shake it off when I hear it, but to come out to a letter on my car like that, I was taken back and in shock that people are that ignorant."

"What I might look like on the outside is not how I feel like on the outside," she said, noting that she was the only car in the accessible area at the time.

"A handicap permit is meant for handicap people Only!" read the letter, "You are not handicap you should be ashamed of your self for taking a handicap spot simply because you are Lazy. Shame — shame."

Aneta called her niece and sister Christina Prantera in tears. When Christina heard the news she posted a photo of the note to Facebook.

"I wanted people to understand that this isn't acceptable," said Christina. The post has received over 2,000 shares as of last Friday evening.

"Something that was

really bad and negative ... turned extremely positive. By the end of the day (Aneta) was so overjoyed by the response that she got," she said. "I didn't know it was going to get this big. I really didn't."

The most frustrating thing for Aneta was the use of the world "lazy."

"If I was lazy I would have been put in a wheelchair three years ago and have given up," said Aneta. "Instead, I went to the Hotel Dieu Shaver, I had intense physiotherapy ... I taught myself how to walk and think again."

The disease has affected every aspect of Aneta's life. She had to sell her investment of the pizzeria she owned with her sister because she was not able to work in the heat. She switched careers altogether, from culinary to retail. The note came a day before her first shift at Walmart.

This isn't the first time Aneta has had this problem. She had a similar experience outside of Foodland in Thorold.

"I was getting into my car and an older gentleman parked next to the handicap parking spot started yelling at me about how I'm using my grandma's parking permit and I should be ashamed of myself," she said. Luckily, a uniformed police officer walking by was able to diffuse the situation.

Robyn Garner, manager of programs and services at the MS Society Niagara Peninsula Chapter of Hope said Aneta's situation isn't unique.

"I think the issue that many people with MS face when exiting their vehicle is that they're seen as someone that is not disabled. Those symptoms may not be as visible to other people as they are to the person

living with the disease," said Garner.

"It has happened to other people," she added.

One of those people is Regina Szymanski. Szymanski is a volunteer at the MS Society and also knows Aneta personally.

When Szymanski was first diagnosed 13 years ago, she was confronted outside of a Best Buy with her children in her car.

"He came up to me and started giving me a hassle," she said. "My kids were quite upset at the time. So now whenever I do park I'm always scared."

"It happens frequently," she added. "I think all of us have had at least one experience with that."



JULIE JOCEM, POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Aneta Prantera suffers from MS and makes use of a handicap sticker for her vehicle. Recently an unnamed individual left an angry letter on her windshield for rightfully using her handicap pass at the Pen Centre.

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Starting review of town's zoning bylaw

Ever wonder what controls the heights and sizes of buildings in a community? What rules allow certain type of uses, like a gas station or an apartment building or townhouse in one area, but not in another? Or where do the rules come from for the amount of parking a store or an apartment or a church must have?

In Ontario, it's a community zoning bylaw that contains detailed information on what kind of land use and what kinds of physical structures are allowed on each property in town. The zoning bylaw puts into effect the town's "official plan" or secondary plans (like the East Fonthill secondary plan or the North-West Fonthill secondary plan).

The details include the height and "massing" of buildings, the distance buildings must be set back from the street or other yards, and any landscaping requirements.

Since zoning bylaws are legally enforceable under the Ontario Planning Act, proposed developments that do not fit the bylaw's require-

ments are not allowed to proceed unless they receive a variance. Thus, this important bylaw helps achieve council's objectives for a successful, vibrant, and livable community.

The existing zoning bylaw was approved in 1987 and contains hundreds of exemptions and variances.

Since we recently updated the town's official plan via the Ontario Municipal Board approval in 2014, staff have been working on re-drafting a new zoning bylaw. That draft was presented publicly on Monday.

Staff proposed that we begin the consultation process on the draft bylaw and receive feedback from you and other members of the community and agencies this Fall. We will schedule public open houses, meetings with the development community, and a special meeting with council to receive agency input.

Following this type of consultation with the community and council, staff will revise the draft zoning bylaw to address the comments and feedback

received. Then council will likely undertake a second round of community consultation.

As you will appreciate, the town's new zoning bylaw will be an important document that will oversee growth and development in the town for many years.

If you are interested in reviewing staff's first public draft, please check out our July 25 Policy & Priorities Committee agenda at <https://pelham-pubescrhe-meetings.com>. Alternatively, please watch both traditional and social media for further information about meetings and updates.

Council and I look forward to working together with you and other residents and business owners to update our zoning bylaw to ensure Pelham continues to be a successful, vibrant, and livable. With a unique blend of residential housing types, commercial-mixed uses, and agricultural operations and uses.

You may contact Mayor Dave at mayordave@pelham.ca or read past columns at www.pelhammayordave.blogspot.com.



Pelham's town hall.

POSTMEDIA FILE PHOTO

Lasting memories shared

Business owner and personal historian Rita Visser is creating "footprints of people's hearts" to be cherished by her clients.

She started the company Momentos Canada because of her passion to tell people's stories. This resulted in her making keepsake books with family history, photos, and quotes which people can keep and pass on to future generations.

The books also acts as a way to share their history with other members of the family.

"People want to know who their grandfather's first love was. Or people might have an uncle who has a character trait that we can relate to, that we can use to discover ourselves," Visser said.

Visser said in today's society

people are so busy and don't put the time into asking their grandparents or other relatives questions. She takes the time to interview client's family members to create a book of about 70 pages which tells a story about someone they care about.

"So many people have said to me over the years, 'Oh, I wish I would have taken the time, but it's too late.' Or 'Oh, I wish I would have sat down with my grandmother when I thought about it.'"

Visser said when she started Momentos Canada a month and a half ago she got her first client right away. Visser said that first client had lost many people this year and wanted to create something which was

meaningful.

"I interviewed her mother and her aunt and it was a really beautiful experience together."

From start to finish the process takes about 60 hours of work. Visser meets with clients and their family members to provide a checklist of what she needs from them. This includes certain types of photos and interview questions, so they can prepare for when Visser meets with them again.

Visser said the interview day usually takes about three to four hours.

"I transcribe it word for word, and I cry and I laugh. It is a wonderful experience."

Visser said the finished product can be ready within about three weeks.

The whole experience, including interviews, the book, and audio recording costs \$1,200. She said the price might change depending on length or if someone wants additional copies.

"You are getting somebody's life story. I feel like people deserve that tribute while they are here."

Visser is also working on creating documentaries called "hi-you for people. Right now she is putting together a production team and hopes to launch this aspect of momentos soon.

For more information and to contact Visser visit mymomentos.ca or email lifestories@mymomentos.ca.



MICHELLE ALLENBERG/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Owner of Momentos Canada and personal historian Rita Visser talks about creating a personal history book for clients.

MAllenber@postmedia.com

Beware of local beach conditions

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

It's Brian Grant's business to keep a close eye on local water conditions.

After all, posts deeming swimming unsafe in Lake Erie have potential to reduce his number of customers looking for fun on Lake Erie that day.

For that reason, Grant, the owner of a Wainfleet water sports equipment rental company, is constantly checking the Niagara Region public health website that regularly updates the status of area beaches.

"I'm at their mercy," he says with a laugh, adding he also closely monitors wind direction and follows marine charts to ensure the safety of his clientele.

The owner of 905 Rentals says the No. 1 question he gets from out-of-town customers looking to enjoy time at the lake is about water conditions.

People often say they've heard about algae issues in the water and ask about the risks of taking a dip, Grant says.

"They want to know if it's safe to swim here.

"I have to tell them it changes every day," he says, and that postings could change from morning to afternoon.

"If it's posted (unsafe) with a lot of seaweed, I will call people and recommend they don't come in. I will leave it up to them if they still wish to come. For a lot of people if it's the only day they've got off, they come anyway."

The other day there was 20 feet of seaweed on the beach and I still had Sea-Doo rentals going out all day."

But it all depends on the crowd.

Earlier this week, the amount of algae that washed up on the beach scared busi-



ALLAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

As the owner of a watersport rental business on Lake Erie, Brian Grant keeps close tabs on water quality testing done by Niagara Region. Beachgoers should do the same.

ness away.

"There was no way people were going to come down," Grant says, adding the beach was bare as the algae sat on the shore and baked.

When it comes to local beachgoers, Grant believes they're less hesitant to head

into the deep regardless of public health's warning.

"Local people pretty much don't care," he says. "If it's posted and there's no seaweed floating on the shoreline, people have no regard for it whatsoever."

Grant is one of those people.

Whether it's posted or not, he takes a daily plunge — often with friends by his side.

"I'm a diehard. I love the beach ... If I don't go for a swim every day, I have a nervous breakdown," he quips.

But that daring attitude can

come with consequences.

Last year, one of Grant's friends got sick with E. coli after one of their regular group swims.

Bjorn Christensen, public health's director of environmental health, says the postings are in place and updated

daily for a reason.

Swimming in contaminated water could mean ear and eye infections or, for those people who unintentionally consume the tainted liquid, could mean intestinal illness.

Continued on page 8

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Moratorium on hospital cuts?

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

In addition to learning that no decisions have been made regarding a new south Niagara hospital, Welland MPP Cindy Forster says south Niagara communities also have a commitment from Ontario's health minister that no further cuts to services will be implemented until the planning process is complete.

The provincial government, along with the Local Health Integration Network, are currently at Phase 1B of a five-phase planning process, she said.

Forster joined mayors Frank Campion from Welland, John Maloney from Port Colborne and April Jeffs from Wainfleet for a July 13 meeting with Health Minister Eric Hoskins.

Describing the meeting as "a team effort to try and turn the ship around, a hit," Forster said a major course correction was the commitment from the minister regarding the immediate future of local Niagara

Health System hospitals.

"The minister made it clear that there should not be any cuts to any services at any of the hospital sites during this planning process," she said.

"He made that very clear and he indicated to his staff that they needed to follow up with the NHS to make sure that



Forster

could end concerns about incremental service cuts at south Niagara hospitals.

"You know, little things here and there," Forster said, adding Hoskins asked her and the mayors to "keep on top of that and let the ministry know."

"He opened it up to the mayors to talk directly to the Ministry of Health and for me to talk directly to him when

these issues come to light. I was glad he gave them a clear directive on that issue because we continue to see erosion, right."

Statements from local mayors saying Hoskins told them no decision has been made regarding a new south Niagara hospital, published last Thursday, prompted Niagara Falls MPP Wayne Gates to write a letter to the health minister asking him to clarify the comments.

"Based on the announcements made by the premier, my discussions with the ministry as well as the leadership of the Niagara Health System, we were under the impression that the project, though in an early stage, was confirmed and would be completed. I am writing to you to ask if this has changed or if the people of Niagara can still expect a new Niagara Falls hospital," Gates wrote in the letter that was also sent to local newspapers.

But Forster, Gates' NDP colleague, said Hoskins repeated



POSTMEDIA NETWORK FILE PHOTO

Welland hospital

his statement several times during the meeting.

"He said that more than once," Forster said, "and he had his staff confirm that by nodding their heads. He said, 'Isn't that right?' to his group. Clearly, this is an investigative process."

Asked for an explanation, the Ministry of Health issued a statement from Hoskins regarding the meeting.

"We would like to reiterate our platform commitment of building a new Niagara hospital at the previously approved site, but as we go through this process of planning in the region our government is committed to finding ways to maintain access to health-care services for residents of Welland and the surrounding area," said the statement attributed to the health minister.

Hoskins also thanked Champion and other south Niagara representatives "for a produc-

tive meeting last week and a continuing dialogue about access to health-care services in Welland."

"I understand the importance of access and sustainability of health care in Welland," Hoskins said in the e-mail.

"I know the local LHIN is in the midst of the reviewing the master program submission from Niagara Health which includes plans for services in Welland."

He said the NHS has undertaken extensive community engagement throughout its planning process, and he's "confident that NH will continue to engage the community of Welland as it refines its plans for local services."

"Niagara Health, the local LHIN and my ministry will continue to work together to ensure appropriate and accessible services are available to the citizens of the Niagara region," Hoskins said.

Asked if the NHS was concerned about any impact on plans for area hospitals, an NHS spokesman referred reporters to www.nlagara-health.on.ca/en/planning-our-future.

As a plan is in development, "our hospital sites will continue to provide services as they do today across Niagara," the NHS says on its website.

ABenner@postmedia.com

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Beach water quality not acceptable for swimming

Continued from page 5

"It's important that we monitor the beaches pretty closely to provide information to the public, whether they should go into the water or not," he says. "Nobody's closing any beaches, but it advises them the water quality is not acceptable for swimming. Hopefully the general public heeds those warnings."

Christensen urged beachgoers to check www.niagararegion.ca/living/water/beaches before heading to the sandy shores. Public health tests 26 Niagara beaches.

The spot they were hoping to visit may be posted unsafe, but the website may also indicate another nearby option where the water has passed testing, he says.

"It gives them the ability to make an informed decision about where they want to go to enjoy a nice afternoon."

Water quality is constantly changing and is impacted by many factors, which makes frequent testing for E. coli values key, Christensen says.

That can include area geese, duck and other fowl populations, heavy rainfall, which can cause runoff into the lakes, air temperature and high winds, which can create wave action that can "resuspend bacterial that may be in the sand sediment," he says.

Geography also comes into play, with variations of land causing water to be more stagnant in some areas.

"There are so many factors that come into play. That's why some of the beaches we know are very heavily used are sampled on a seven-day-

a-week basis so that we can provide accurate and timely information to the public."

Due to the extremely dry weather Niagara has seen so far this summer, there have been fewer postings labelling beaches as unsafe to swim, Christensen says.

"We haven't had runoff that may cause an infiltration of contaminants into some of our beaches — so that's a plus," he says.

But it's still early in the season. As water temperatures continue to rise, bacterial action has potential to increase.

When it does, public health will be there to warn beachgoers and Christensen is hopeful they will listen.

Grant says it would be useful for public health to find other ways to reach out to tourists, who often don't know where to look for beach postings.

They rent waterfront cottages and go out in the water in front of their rentals without ever seeing the posted signs on public beach areas, he says.

Because of the extreme temperatures Niagara has seen so far this summer and the mild winter that just passed, Grant believes there are many postings on the way.

The Lake Erie algae bloom didn't become a topic of discussion until mid-August last year, but he suspects it's well on its way in July.

"It's way more advanced this year than last."

mfrht@postmedia.com
Twitter: @mfrhtStandard



BOB TYMCZYSHYN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Jess Wiens leads a Pilates class on stand-up paddleboards recently at Sunset Beach in St. Catharines. As Niagara waters appeal to locals looking to beat the sweltering heat, the public health department suggests they first check out its water quality website.



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Niagara getting ready to be set for GO

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

Local work remains on track to support GO Transit's arrival to Niagara.

Following a provincial announcement last month that daily commuter rail service will reach the area by 2021, regional staff remain focused on plans for station construction and surrounding development.

Niagara Region's planning and development committee received an update recently on the GO hub and transit stations study, which

has been underway since January.

The province has committed to bringing GO to Grimsby by 2021, expanding through to St. Catharines and Niagara Falls by 2023. The rail expansion project will include construction of a new station at Casabianca Boulevard in Grimsby, as well as upgrades to existing train stations in St. Catharines and Niagara Falls.

Those retrofits will begin as soon as next summer.

The Region's study, costing \$712,000 and set to be

finished in 15 months, will result in creation of preferred concepts for the three proposed GO stations, as well as an additional station at Ontario Street in Beamsville.

It will also include secondary plans for lands in and around the stations, a transportation analysis and market analysis to determine potential area development.

The first of six phases has been completed, with context and review of the study finished in June, said Diana Morreale, the Region's manager of community planning.

The second phase will include work on the visions for the transit hub and stations, will review best practices and look at future demand and capacity.

I think we need to be cognizant we're going to really create some traffic jams in the local area around there."

West Lincoln Mayor Doug Joyner

It will also include details such as connectivity needs, parking needs and costing of related capital projects, in addition to an implementation plan.

Public consultation meetings were held in the four municipalities with stations at the end of June, but only a handful of people attended each.

Future engagement sessions will take place when

the draft secondary plans are available in late fall, Morreale said, adding the project team is aware the turnout was not ideal.

In Grimsby, residents recommended the station's height should preserve views of the waterfront and escarpment. Concerns were also raised that part of the structure will be within the green belt, which may threaten the woodlot and natural corridors nearby, planner Denise Landry said.

"The group suggested that buffers be used around the station to protect the features."

Suggestions were made in other communities about restricting the height of the stations, ensuring transit connectivity and improving the streetscapes in surrounding areas.

West Lincoln Mayor Doug Joyner called it "vital" that focus be placed on how peo-

ple get to and from the stations. In addition to the creation of an inter-municipal transit system, that should also include a closer look at road infrastructure en route and additional parking opportunities in other areas with busing to the station, he said.

"I think we need to be cognizant we're going to really create some traffic jams in the local area around there."

Staff are reaching out to the Metrolinx to determine how to move the process forward and to discuss who will be responsible for completing different project components, acting chief administrative officer Mo Lewis said.

If the Region completes some of the work Metrolinx had initially expected to take on, there may be some leveraging opportunities to bring the service to Niagara sooner, he added.

With the province leaving the door open for improvements within the timeline, Regional Chairman Alan Caslin called it important that the Region continue its advocacy, taking down any potential barriers and doing what it can to "help the project move forward faster if at all possible."

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Anti-poverty leaders praise new child benefit

DON FRASER

Postmedia Network

Elisabeth Zimmermann is cheering a federal plan and its potential to combat Niagara poverty.

A new Canada Child Benefit, aimed at raising hundreds of thousands of Canadians out of poverty, is a massive accomplishment, she said.

"This is so good — it is really huge," said Zimmermann, executive director of YWCA Niagara Region and an anti-poverty advocate. "This is going to really help support families living on social assistance to be closer to getting above the poverty line."

"So I think it's really amazing for them," she said. "Otherwise it would have been to positive benefit if it had just been clawed back."

"I'm glad to see this come through."

The non-taxable, income-tested child benefit that rolled out last Wednesday means an average family will receive about \$2,300 in a program that was key to the Liberals' campaign platform.

The Liberals said the benefit will cut the child poverty rate in Canada to 6.7 per cent from 11.2 per cent, by this time next year.

Federal officials said as a result, an estimated nearly 300,000 children and 200,000 adults will have their family income rise to above the low-income cutoff.

The single benefit replaces a system that required parents to apply for the Canada child tax benefit and the national child benefit supplement, and taxed monthly universal child care benefit payments.

Canada's finance department has said 3.3 million out of 3.8 million Canadian families will receive more under the new program.

The benefit won't count as income and count against a tax return next year, and he taxed like the previous universal child care benefit. Provinces have also said they won't include the money when calculating income-tested benefits.

Eligible Canadian families with child under 18 will receive their first Canada Child Benefit cheque this

month.

It will provide a maximum annual benefit of up to \$6,400 per child under the age of six and up to \$4,400 per child aged six through 17.

Families with a net income of less than \$30,000 get the full benefit of \$533 a month for a child under six and \$450 a month for children aged six to 17. Benefit levels drop as income rises.

Glen Walker, chair of the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network, called the federal plan "a great announcement for us."

"The advantage is a lot more people who are living in poverty are going to benefit. It will drive more people out of that poverty."

Walker said complementary moves have also happened at the provincial level, with changes to tax exemptions in some benefits paid to families.

At the federal and provincial levels "we're really seeing efforts to put resources in the hands of very needy children and families," he said. "It's only going to help our families living (in poverty) and struggling in Niagara."

The effects will be far-reaching, he said, and that includes driving up economic prosperity locally.

"These families are going to be going out, buying local and using this for direct purchases of goods and services."

Meanwhile, as many as 6,000 people and families are part of the client list at Community Care of St. Catharines and Thorold, which operates food hanks and provides other services for the local poor.

His CEO, Betty-Lou Souter, sees these people on the fringes being helped by the plan. Still, Souter is cautious in her praise about the new

WHAT ST. CATHARINES' MP SAYS

Poverty has had an indelible impact on Niagara, says St. Catharines MP Chris Bittle.

And that's why a federal child benefit was close to his heart while campaigning on that key Liberal platform during the last federal election.

"This is a generational change in terms of changes to government benefits," said Bittle in an interview. "It's going to have a huge impact in Niagara."

Bittle said the goal of the new plan is to make things "simpler, more generous, tax free."

"At the end of the day ... the goal is to reduce child poverty in Canada by 40 per cent," Bittle recalled being asked to speak during his first day in the House of Commons. He rose and spoke about child poverty in St. Catharines — he'd recently read an article in The Standard that 24 per cent of its children were living below the poverty line.

Later, he received a call from a local social-agency leader suggesting the number could actually be closer to one-third living below the poverty line in the city.

"It's unacceptable," he said.

To that end, the new plan "is going to have a significant, dramatic effect on poverty rates in Niagara," Bittle said.

He said the benefit will also go to families making less than \$50,000 a year. "These are people that are going to spend money on their families," he said.

"The money is going to go back into the economy, and this is going to do well for the local and national economy."

plan.

"The devil is always in the details," Souter said. "So we'll just have to see how it goes."

With people in abject poverty, who struggle to survive every day, a focus is on the "bottom-line impact to their budgets," she said.

"Whatever that net gain ... is more than what they have the day before," Souter said. "And it's certainly the next step in the process to get them to where they have to be."

While there are hopes the extra cash will help families save for their children's education "when you can't keep the lights on and food

on the table, it's a challenge to think of putting money away, when basic survival is foremost on your mind," Souter said.

"However ... I commend their creative approach to get people to get people to the next level."

Some criticism has been levelled by Canada's federal opposition parties on the plan.

In a Conservative Party of Canada statement last week, MP Karen Vecchio, official opposition critic for families, children and social development, said "far too many families are learning today that they are not going to get the financial support

they need when it matters the most."

Vecchio said that's because the Canada Child Benefit — unlike the Universal Child Care Benefit — which provided stable support to all families — is based on your previous year's income.

"Canadians who have been laid off in the last six months or had their hours reduced won't qualify for the maximum benefit this year, regardless of the fact that their families are struggling to make ends meet," said Vecchio's release.

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Ducks composting inside Lincoln barn

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

It could take up to 60 days for the bodies of 14,000 ducks euthanized at a Lincoln farm to be composted on site.

The King Street farm, where the birds are still being housed, was placed under quarantine July 7 by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) after the discovery of H5 avian influenza.

Composting of the ducks is underway, with the CFIA overseeing the first phase, known as bio-heat treatment.

That process involves building composting piles and checking their temperature daily for six days in order to kill the virus, the agency said in an e-mailed statement.

The compost piles need to be above 37°C for six continuous days in order to kill the virus, said spokeswoman Abigail Dancy, of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, which is assisting on the farm.

"Normally, the core pile temperature will get much hotter than this during initial stage of composting, typically in the range of 50°C to 65°C."

Normally, the core pile temperature will get much hotter than this during initial stage of composting, typically in the range of 50°C to 65°C."

Abigail Dancy

Dancy estimated it could take between 30 to 60 days for the ducks to be composted into "soil-like material."

Asked about potential odours caused as a result, she said composting, when done correctly, "should not smell."

"The only time that there may be a smell is when the pile is turned or mixed to aerate it; In which case, there may be an odour for a day or two. The pile is turned at minimum once but more frequent turning/mixing helps to speed up the composting process."

Story continues on page 18



BOB TYMCZYSYN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

The quarantine remains in effect at the Lincoln duck where avian influenza was discovered.

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University study to shed light on youth risk taking

DOM FRASER
Postmedia Network



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Teena Willoughby, co-director of Brock University's centre for lifespan development and research team leader.

The behaviour of adolescents can be troubling.

In some cases that behaviour can lead to harmful risk taking, drinking behind the wheel or sexual misadventure.

A lot of research has gone into impulses and reward-seeking in kids, and now a Brock University team is taking it much further.

Recently, it has been awarded a \$1.43-million grant for research into a more profound understanding of that risk-taking.

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research funding covers five years of study on the development of brain mechanisms that increase motivation to seek rewards, and hold back impulses.

The large study will focus on what happens to adolescents' brains when facing risk temptations, including situations when they're fired-up with friends.

Sixteen researchers are involved in the work — including Brock and McMaster University and in The Netherlands and the U.S.

"Everyone has an area of strength that will come into play in this study," said Teena Willoughby, co-director of Brock University's centre for lifespan development and research team leader. "It's quite a large study and hopefully we can get a more holistic view of adolescent risk taking."

Willoughby said Brock has a number of researchers interested in adolescent development, and in particular in risk taking.

While the question of why adolescents engage in risk taking is well researched, another angle is emerging — brain development and activity that can be researched through brain-imaging and analysis machines such as MRIs and EEGs.

A new theory also suggests different areas in the brain may play a role in risk-taking development.

Sensation and novelty-seeking can develop early, creating heightened sensation seeking at that age, Willoughby said. However, the pre-frontal cortex, that can put the brakes on that behaviour, may be lagging behind. That's especially so when kids are with friends and weathering peer pressure.

Willoughby said while a number of studies have been done in this general area,

most have been lab-based and less to the real world and what youth do at home.

"And none of them have looked at it over time," she said, adding that's because that level of research is expensive and tough to do.

To that end, researchers involved in the study plan to monitor the development, over five years, of at least 600 boys and girls ages eight to 13.

Subjects will fill out annual self-report surveys and do various lab tasks, shedding additional light on brain development theory.

Willoughby said the research is very complex, with other variables at play including the context of risk-taking incidents, environment and personality. Physical fitness will also be monitored.

Among the issues to be probed are whether brain changes lead to risk behaviours, and whether being involved in sports or clubs boosts impulse control.

The team will also be working with partners that fold in the United Nations Children's Fund, Mental Health Commission of Canada, Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Niagara Region's public health department.

It's hoped the research will begin this fall.

Periodic results and data generated from the ongoing research will also be released.

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Study: OSPCA officers underfunded



Lincoln County Humane Society Insp. Todd Menard is throwing his support behind a Brock University study that concludes Ontario's animal control workers are underfunded and put into dangerous situations.

ANDREA TINGEY
Postmedia Network

When Todd Menard signed up to be an OSPCA officer 23 years ago, he expected to be dealing with dog bites and pets trapped in hot cars.

What he didn't expect was to have a knife pulled on him.

"We did have a gentleman years ago that was convicted of animal cruelty for punching his dog out in front of the Superstore here behind us," the inspector said. "When I went up to approach him he actually removed his knife from his person and showed me the knife. Obviously, I stayed back in my vehicle and notified the regional police and waited for them to come back."

"It's unfortunately just a matter of time before someone gets seriously injured on this job," he added.

A study conducted by Brock University professor Kendra Coulter at its centre for labour studies was released Monday. The study, the first of its kind, revealed some of the dangers Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals enforcement officers and their affiliates must face, as well as the uncomfortable conditions they must work in.

"We face these issues every day going into a call where you don't know what's on the other side of that door," said Menard, who works for OSPCA affiliate Lincoln County Humane Society. "We need alternative resources to help deal

“We face these issues every day going into a call where you don't know what's on the other side of that door. We need alternative resources to help deal.”

Todd Menard

with our job.”

OSPCA officers have the same authority as police officers as it relates to animals. They are able to obtain warrants, seize animals, lay charges and perform other enforcement duties. Despite this, they receive only \$5 million of provincial funding, a third of the cost of their animal cruelty investigation work, and rely on donations to cover the rest of their expenses. To put this in perspective, food inspectors are paid entirely by the public purse.

"A lot of that is put into our training and our equipment," said Menard. "It's a good start but it would be nice to see the government continue some sort of funding in the future as well."

Story continues on page 18

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FINDER ELEVEN

SATURDAY, JULY 30

GATES OPEN 7:00 PM

KIM MITCHELL
DAVID WILCOX

MONDAY, AUGUST 1

GATES OPEN 7:00 PM

TIM Q & THE YES MEN
THE CAVERNESSE

Cases may deal also with abuse of people

Armed with only a baton, pepper spray and body armour, enforcement officers often go to dangerous situations alone and without necessary safety information.

"Our training is literally to disengage people because we're going to get hurt and we're not trained to do that," said Kevin Strooband, executive director of Lincoln County Humane Society and an OSPCA inspector.

"The Ontario SPCA does two days of training every year for how to deal with these assaultive situations," he said.

Officers are overwhelmed with calls. The OSPCA has 91 officers who investigate 18,000 complaints of animal cruelty across Ontario each year. In June alone there were 42 calls for animal cruelty in municipalities serviced by Lincoln County Humane Society, which only has three officers that work regularly.

"They not only usually have to work alone and without access to basic information about the people they are investigating, but some officers must enter areas without even cellphone service regularly," said Coulter.

"They are responsible for enforcing laws, but they also see horrific situations which can involve the simultaneous abuse of animals, children and women," she said.

The four OSPCA Niagara Region affiliates — Lincoln County Humane Society, Niagara Region Animal Services, Welland District SPCA, Niagara Falls Humane Society — are in better shape than many of their Ontario

They not only usually have to work alone and without access to basic information about the people they are investigating, but some officers must enter areas without even cellphone service regularly."

Brock University professor Kendra Coulter

counterparts. For example, Lincoln County Humane Society is unionized, its officers have two-way radios, a dispatch, GPS trackers on their trucks and the agency just hired a new officer to help answer calls.

Other areas in Ontario face greater challenges with less resources.

"There is great unevenness across the province," said Coulter.

"In some areas, there isn't even office space for the officer and they have to work from a home office and their own vehicles."

Said Menard, "It's about time that this study came to the public attention because of the awareness that it brings to the dangers of our job."

atl@postmedia.com

Compost can be fertilizer

Continued from page 14

The process includes construction of a compost windrow, with wood shavings or straw laid down and a mixture of bird carcasses, manure and leftover feed piled on the base.

The windrow is then covered with another layer of wood shavings or straw to contain odours, Dancy said.

No soil is added.

Once completed, the compost can be spread on cropland as fertilizer or can be taken to an approved landfill, she said.

The CFIA said the compost will be released to the owner of the property.

In response to questions regarding measures being taken to prevent wildlife from entering the barn where the ducks are being stored, the CFIA said the "compost piles are inside a closed-door barn."

Dancy said there is no scavenger interest in compost piles when the process is done properly.

The CFIA will take measures to "exclude wildlife during initial composting" she added.

Once the composted material has been removed from the barn, cleaning and disinfecting of the structure will begin, the agency said.

A control zone, put in place by the CFIA to monitor surrounding properties within a three-kilometre radius of the infected farm, also remains in effect, as the virus is highly contagious among fowl.

The strain of avian flu found on the farm causes only mild illness in birds and rarely affects humans who do not have consistent contact with infected birds.

Avian influenza does not pose a food safety risk if poultry is handled and cooked properly.

mfrl@postmedia.com
Twitter: @mfrlStandard

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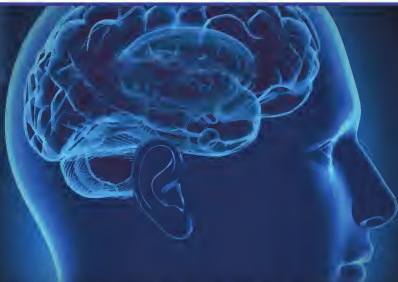
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New police HQ a ‘gem’: Chief

RAY SPITERI
Postmedia Network

Efficient and synergistic. Those are two common words used by Niagara Regional Police officials during a media tour of the new \$65-million headquarters in Niagara Falls last Friday.

“It looks big, glamorous and we’ve heard some people refer to it as the Taj Mahal, it’s not, it’s very efficient,” said Chief Jeff McGuire, adding the 210,000-square-foot facility was long overdue.

“I think the Region should be very proud of what they’ve done. Our employees, it’s a huge boost to them. Ideally, in a perfect world what we’d be able to do is give you this tour and then give you the tour of where they’re coming from.

“Those buildings, ... they were due to be replaced 10 or 15 years ago.”

“It will be a gem for the Region, it’ll be a gem for policing.”

Construction of the new headquarters began in 2013 and is expected to be completed within the next few weeks.

It will replace two existing facilities: the police headquarters on James Street in St. Catharines and the Niagara Falls detachment on Morrison Street.

The new three-story complex is located off Valley Way and was built on eight acres of land near the Ontario Provincial Police station in a high-profile location, visible from Highway 420.

The new headquarters will house about 600 of the NRP’s 1,100 uniform and civilian members. There will be 415 parking spaces and, for the first time, many units will be working under the same roof.

Inspector Richard Frayne



PHOTOS BY MIKE DUBATISTA/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

The Niagara Regional Police headquarters, in Niagara Falls.

said the NRP is moving into the new facility in nine phases, starting with the Niagara Falls patrol unit.

McGuire said the facility should be operational just after Labour Day.

“There’s a great mixture of functionality, security and a welcoming environment for the community,” said Deputy Chief Joe Matthews.

“We didn’t build a fortress, we built ... additional security ... but it’s not visible and with the amount of natural light, especially in the main lobby, we’re really proud of the fact that we’ve created a welcoming environment that we’ll be able to share with the community because it’s their building.”

“I am confident that what we’ve got is one of the premier police facilities in North America.”

Kenneth Gansel, vice-chairman of the police services board, said the board is “extremely impressed” with the project.

“It may not look as though certain things in the building have a synergy of trying to

make things more efficient, but we’re moving to a central lock-up, we’re moving to central property,” he said. “All of this is an efficiency in time and in employees’ time and moving stuff around and dealing with prisoners.

“I am confident that what we’ve got is one of the premier police facilities in North America.”

Deputy Chief Joe Matthews

“This is a building for the community. It’s not a fortress of iron gates and barbed wire.”

Gansel noted when visitors walk in, they’ll see a community room which will also be the police services board boardroom.

“It can be used for victim services meetings, it can be used for other community groups that are related to police involvement.”

He said the facility has a state-of-the-art 911 and communications centre, which is scheduled to go live in mid to late September.

Gansel said the facility’s “extremely efficient lock-up,” including protective glass where prisoners in the temporary 24-hour holding cells can’t see out of one side.

“It creates an atmosphere where you don’t have so much prisoner yelling and screaming and it creates

calm in a probably semi-hostile environment.”

During the tour, Frayne said the complex has 43 cells that can hold 53 prisoners.

The cells don’t have bars and the toilets are separated by a privacy wall.

For safety reasons, cell benches are heated so officers don’t have to provide inmates with blankets.

The flow of water in the cell is controlled from the outside by officers, who, for example, can flush the toilet.

The building has been designed to have a large number of windows to allow not just for natural light, but also to maximize sight lines throughout the building.

Near the entrance, there is a self-reporting kiosk, where visitors can file their own reports, or fill out requests for information.

There are 500 lockers for officers, but also evidence lockers, which are protected by card and code technology.

Near the cell-block area are rooms where officers can administer breathalyzers.

There is a forensic services area where high-tech examinations can be done.

In addition to a police dispatch centre, officials said they’re excited about a real-time operations centre, which they hope to expand in the near future to take advantage of live video technology.

“Once a police facility opens, the doors will never close. It’s like it’s to a hospital,” said Matthews.

rspiteri@postmedia.com
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Niagara Regional Police Inspector Richard Frayne shows one of the jail cells in the new NRP headquarters in Niagara Falls.



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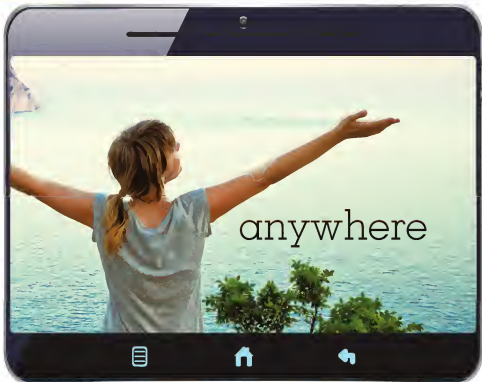
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